

COMPLICATION COMPLICATION

atches tell the time, and if you've gotten as far as reading this magazine, you're probably with the program on that. But watches do a lot of other things with time too, ranging from the fairly obvious in function — for instance, a chronograph measures the duration of a particular event — to the obscure, such as the equation of time, which even the most well-informed of enthusiasts need to go to the books to make sure they understand completely.

Among the most obscure of watch complications is the regatta chronograph, which is also sometimes known as the yacht timer. This chronograph is obscure not because it's hard to figure out what it does, but because it's a very specific complication. It's also, at least on the face of it, of dubious interest to anyone who doesn't have a yacht nor an inclination to race one. But the regatta chronograph, like mechanical watches themselves, brings with it an aura of romance and history that takes it out of the narrow realm of the practical, and gives it a Horatio Hornblower appeal. You needn't be a yachtsman to understand the appeal of a yacht timer (most of us don't dive with our dive watches anyway), and a regatta chronograph, besides being sometimes very interesting mechanically, reminds us of the joys of sailing that have been experienced by those navigating the "wine-dark" sea, ever since Homer called it that in *The Iliad*, more than 2,000 years ago.

The basic purpose of a regatta chronograph is to count down the minutes remaining before the start of a regatta. Although the term "regatta" can mean any kind of boat race, regatta chronographs are pretty much specifically designed for yacht racing or racing sailboats. The big question, of course, is why you'd need a chronograph specifically for counting down the time until the start of the race. After all, wouldn't a plain old chronograph do just as well?

Well, that depends, for a sailboat race is not like a car race or the 100-yard dash, where competitors stay at a dead stop at the starting line until the gun goes off or the flag drops. Sailboats are constantly in motion as long as they're not at anchor, they're flying some canvas, and when there's any kind of wind. This means that just before a yacht race starts, the boats are not all neatly nosed to the starting line; instead, they're maneuvering behind it in such a way as to ensure that, for an ideal start, the bow of the yacht crosses the start line exactly at the instant the race starts.

regattas, a race is won or lost before the race proper even starts, as statistically, the first yacht to cross the start line is the one that has the best chance of winning the race. The start line itself is an imaginary line drawn between two points. Usually, one point is a buoy while the other point is the committee boat — the boat from which the officials display signal flags and sound signals for the start of the race. The rules governing yacht racing are the Racing Rules of Sailing, which are published by the ISAF (International Sailing Federation), an organization with roots that run all the way back to the beginning of the 20th century, when the first efforts to set international rules for yacht racing began. Before

about 1870, individual yachting clubs all pretty much had their own rules, with predictable results in terms of chaos,

frustration and ill feeling.

This maneuver before the start of a race takes a lot of skill. Often, in THE REGATTA
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Generally, a warning signal is given ten minutes before the race starts, and the countdown proper starts five minutes before the race begins. There are strict rules governing false starts as well. The last five minutes before the start of the race are of vital importance: Start late, and your chances of winning diminish; start early and you may be penalized. For a yachtsman, clearly, anything that gives you an edge, in terms of crossing the line exactly when you're supposed to, is a good thing, and this is where the yacht timer, or regatta chronograph, comes in. The earliest forms of yacht timers, which began to appear more frequently after 1900, were, in fact, either chronographs with a special scale for the minutes counter, or stopwatches which likewise had a graduated scale marking off the critical ten- and five-minute intervals before the race starts. As the years went by, stopwatches made specifically for yacht racing also appeared; Heuer, for instance, made a variety of such yacht timers, including models with a small hand sweeping through a sector on the dial to show the countdown from the five-minute warning gun.

The problem with using a normal chronograph, and to some extent even a stopwatch, to keep track of the critical five-minute countdown to the start of the race is that if you're the skipper, you're likely to have a lot of other things on your mind during this short span of time. You'll also be trying to manage your crew, keeping an eye on the other yachts, and making sure you're staying on an optimum course to cross the start line exactly when the gun goes off; and you're doing all these things on a moving vessel under, usually, less than optimal viewing conditions. Even if, for instance, it's a fine sunny day, the sun's probably glaring like mad off the water and every other reflective surface, such that reading the minute register of a chronograph accurately under such conditions isn't going to be easy either. And when you consider that by the time most of us have gotten to a point in life where we can afford a yacht, close-up vision isn't what it used to be. Thus, relying on a standard chronograph to keep track of the countdown is really asking for trouble, penalties and — God forbid — mockery at the yacht club.

The finest horological minds, to whom we can be grateful, have always turned their genius to enhancing the lifestyles of those with a fanatical obsession with narrow-appeal leisure activities, be they polo playing or yacht racing. And it was in 1962 that a small company was founded whose destiny it was to bring joy to the hearts of presbyopic yachtsmen the world over. That company is Aquastar, which began with making diver's watches, and still makes yachting watches today. The classic yacht timer watch, with its five disks that change color as the countdown to the start of the race proceeds, was patented by Aquastar in 1964 — the original patent actually showed a cutout sector on the dial that changed color during the countdown, not the later individual cutout circles. But by 1965, the "Regate", as it was known, had taken on the form it has today.

Says well-known Heuer historical expert Jeff Stein, "In 1965, Heuer began to distribute the full line of Aquastar watches. Included in this line of watches was the Aquastar 'Regate', a countdown timer designed for sailing. Soon after that time, the name 'Heuer' was added to the dial of the Aquastar Regate, so that the watch was co-branded with the Heuer and Aquastar names. This chronograph was produced by Aquastar and powered by the Felsa 4000N movement."

In 1976, Heuer began making its own yacht timer watches, this time using a Lemania caliber 1345. Since then, other firms have gotten into the game, but the number of yachting-themed watches vastly exceeds the number that actually have a dedicated yacht timing function. The colored disk method of displaying the elapsed time until the starting gun goes off has remained the most common display method, though other very clever methods have evolved, which improved on the original Aquastar patent of 1964.

# Sport-Timers and Wrist Chronographs

Yacht timers and navigational clock

Yachting

How to make a good

start in a yacht race

Ref. 1000

### HEUER GAME-MASTER WRIST TIMER

Incabloc jeweled shock-protection unbreakable mainspring-7 lewels steel back-complete with leather strap Ideal for all sport timing.

Reading: Thin black second hand makes one revolution in 60 seconds. Red cen ter minute hand registers up to 60 minutes. Dial reads on the inside division in seconds and 1/5 seconds. Black outside turning besel has reverse division indicating remaining time.

Operation: Start, stop and go on by lower left push button. Return to zero of hands by upper left push button, which can be locked to prevent acci-

Set red triangle of rotating ring on known duration of game or event, and block rotating ring by means of right hand flat screw. Read elapsed time off dial and remaining time off rotating

Ref. 1000 GAME-MASTER

NET PRICE \$4500



### HEUER WATERPROOF YACHT TIMER

Reading: Large second hand makes one revolution in 60 seconds. Small hand registers up to 10 minutes on a reverse

Operation: Start, stop and flyback to zero by consecutive depressions of the CFOWIL-

Ref. 3912 NET PRICE: \$3950

## HEUER GIANT YACHT TIMER



unbreakable mainspring-7 jewels nickel-chrome case

Fully waterproof case for wrist or lanyard use.

Dial is divided into multicolor segments, simila design than in 33.512. Case however in large 25 inch size with white enemeled finish in splint

Ref. 33.712 (NOT SHOWN) \$3500



Yachting

Yachting, regattas

Ref. 952:10

The time for action

Ref. 33.512

Ref. 952/15



# YACHT TIMERS

# Ref. 503.915 - # 62 mm WATERPROTECTED YACHT TIMER











Ref. 775.915 SUPERSPORT WATERPROTECTED YACHT TIMER

WATERPROTECTED VACHT TIMER









### THE FLEET IS IN: A ROUNDUP OF REGATTA CHRONOGRAPHS

So you've got yourself a half-dozen racing yachts, and you'd like a watch to match each one? Have no fear, for our shortlist of true yacht timers run the gamut from the elementary to the extraordinarily extravagant. Despite their differences, they're all designed to help make sure that when that final starting gun goes off, you've got the jump on the swabs in the other tubs wallowing in your wake.

OMEGA SEAMASTER 300 M RACING CHRONOMETER A titanium on titanium masterpiece of rugged sporting pragmatism, the Seamaster 300 M Racing Chronometer is both a conventional chronograph and a yacht timer, with the five-disk regatta start timer augmented by a conventional chronograph. With a water resistance of 1,000 feet, and a rotating timing bezel, it's a full-on diver's watch too — a go-anywhere timepiece that will come in handy whether you're racing your yacht, or jumping off its stern in scuba gear.

GIRARD-PERREGAUX LAUREATO REGATTA At the high end of watches for the high seas is this masterpiece from Girard-Perregaux. The single pusher at two o'clock starts a countdown timer in a colored sector between nine and 12 o'clock, and when the countdown timer reaches zero, the timer at one o'clock takes over, timing the race proper. At an MSRP of 265,000 USD, with only 32 made in white gold, it's more expensive than a lot of yachts, but this flying tourbillon equipped regatta timer is more than just a pretty face — though with GP's historic mastery of the tourbillon, it's that too, and in spades.

TAG HEUER AQUARACER CALIBER 5 REGATTA Before it was TAG, it was Heuer, and with Aquastar, they put the regatta timer on the market and on the map. Today, TAG Heuer continues the tradition of yachting chronograph production with the Caliber 5 movement, an electromechanical quartz watch that counts down the start time and then automatically switches to chronograph mode to time the race. Dial indications can be set to chronograph, regatta timer or date mode, for a multitasking, tough and practical watch that's a worthy descendant of its pioneering ancestors.

**BULGARI DIAGONO PROFESSIONAL REGATTA** A masterpiece of clean design, the Bulgari Diagono Professional Regatta combines a flyback chronograph function with the regatta timer - very handy for those occasions when the countdown is restarted. Combined THESE WATCHES ARE DESIGNED TO HELP with the compass scale bezel, and with a water resistance of 300 meters, it's a classic implementation of the five-disk regatta timer design that's as at home GOT THE JUMP ON THE under the sea as it is above it.

**LOUIS VUITTON TAMBOUR XL LV CUP REGATTA CHRONO** The new

kid on the block — Louis Vuitton's Tambour line was launched in 2002 — is nonetheless no stranger to the world of aristocratic competition, and it's taking watchmaking as seriously now as it has fine leather goods since 1854. From its watch atelier in La Chaux-de-Fonds comes this regatta chronograph in the signature tambour case shape, with a rectangular colored sector variation on the classic round window regatta timer. The right to

challenge the holder of the America's Cup has historically gone to the winner of the Louis Vuitton Cup regatta, so while Louis Vuitton may be a relative newcomer to watchmaking, yachting is definitely in its blood.

ROLEX OYSTER PERPETUAL YACHT-MASTER II Any new complication from Rolex — whose technical superiority as a watchmaker may be modern watch collecting's inexplicably bestkept secret — is big news. And in the case of the new Yacht-Master II, Rolex has created a supremely functional regatta timer. Two features make it unique: the first is that it's actually programmable for different countdown intervals rather than the standard five- and ten-minute warning guns, to allow for the sometimes variable countdown sequences used by varying classes of boats. The second very useful feature is that, should it be necessary to resynchronize the countdown timer with the actual countdown signal from the committee boat, as it occasionally happens, a firm brief push on the reset button will reset the elansed minute hand to the nearest minute and return the seconds counter to zero. This is a regatta timer's regatta timer — in other words, it's not the multitasker that some of the competition might be, but it does what it is designed to do arguably better than any of them.

ANONIMO TP-CHRONO RACING MODEL 7000 Anonimo, the banner carrier for hometown Italian watchmaking, has created a clever and vividly practical yachting countdown timer in the Racing Model 7000. A quick look at the dial confirms the intriguing layout — the minute and second chronograph hands are mounted co-axially at the center of the dial, and the zero position is at one o'clock on the dial for better visibility. Starting the chronograph moves the minute hand through a distinctly marked sector for the five-minute interval prior to starting, and a 30-second sector on the dial through which the seconds hand sweeps allows an unambiguously clear visual indication of the critical last 30 seconds before crossing the starting line.

TEAM CHRONOGRAPH The Royal Oak Offshore Alinghi Team Chronograph ignited such a feeding frenzy among collectors when it was launched that it's easy to forget the fact that it's also one of the

MAKE SURE YOU'VE

**SWABS IN THE OTHER** 

**TUBS WALLOWING IN** 

YOUR WAKE

**AUDEMARS PIGUET ROYAL OAK OFFSHORE ALINGHI** 

more practical and intelligently designed regatta chronographs in recent memory. Specifically designed for the America's Cup Alinghi Team, this watch combines a vividly visible

> ten-minute countdown timer with a flyback chronograph function. In addition to allowing the countdown timer and chronograph to

track the crucial minutes and seconds prior to the starting gun, the flyback button, when pushed instantly, returns the chronograph counter to zero, where it immediately starts running again to allow the duration of the race to be timed. The incredibly strong forged carbon case material is also fantastically light, which is a nod to the integration of high-tech materials into the time-honored sport of yachting. It gives the team that wears the Alinghi Team Chronograph an edge in weight as well. Impossibly trivial, you say? Well, Team Alinghi, sporting the carbon fiber version of the watch,

won the 2007 America's Cup by one second in the seventh race — those few hundred grams saved just might have made a difference after all. \*

